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POEMS
GOOD, BAD

& INDIFFERENT

By EDITH ALLEN

POEMS
GOOD
BAD &
INDIFFERENT

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PO E M S

GOOD, BAD &

INDIFFERENT

Ames
BY EDITH ALLEN

Ames

LONDON: C. W. DANIEL, LTD.
Graham House, Tudor Street, E.C. 4

R.6001

A337P6

To My Family

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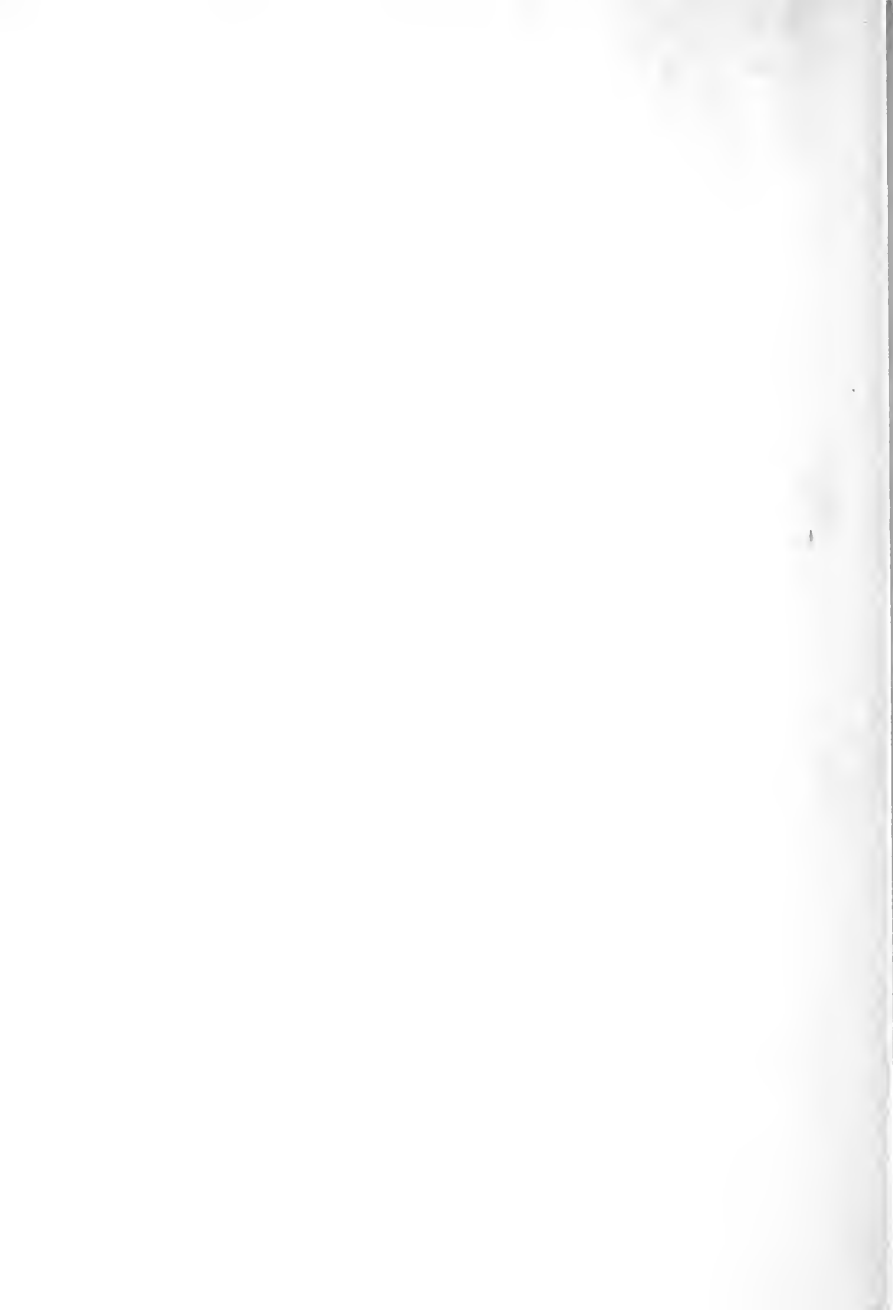
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I
GOOD





AUDREY : "I pray the gods make me honest."

As You Like It.



II

BAD



I

NEGLIGENCE AND IGNORANCES

DEAR, soft-eyed, pure-winged Saints,
Be near my bed,
And mercy pour and love
On all I've said.

May what I've said and done
And all my thought
Cast no uncomely shade
Athwart God's Court.

So bear ye up to Him
My feeble prayer ;
And may it on your wings
Grow passing fair.

II

SPRING

IN days of old sweet Angels came
And bade poor mortals write ;
No veiling guise obscurèd them,
They stood in garments white,
With haloed heads and folded wings,
In silence of the night.

This eve a something came to me,
I cannot give it name ;
All dewy-winged and silver-voiced
And joyous-eyed it came,
Intangible, invisible,
And lovable as flame.

“ Are you a Spirit of the Wind,
A fairy from the Ling— ?
A Goblin from the greenwood shade
Where myriad blue-bells ring ?
A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Faun ? ”
“ No, mortal, I am Spring ! ”

III

THEN

“AND when you are old, what will you do?”

—“What shall I do when I am old?”

I'll think of my youth

In the light of truth,

And wear woollen knee-caps to keep out the
cold.

“I'll think of my sins; I'll think of my
friends,

Of the lives we lived, now sweetly dim;

And often I'll pray

At the close of the day,

And croon broken bars of my favourite hymn.

“I'll live in some cot, not far from a church

Where the altar lamp burns night and day;

And when in my cot

You find me not,

You'll find me, for certain, just over the way.

“ And when I am old, and older yet,
So old, that God seems very near,
 My soul, maybe,
 Will struggle free,
And leave this poor body to slumber here.”

IV
TO ——

THE workshops of Heaven were busy,
A-clang with material and tool ;
The being was practic'ly finished,
And put on a cloud-drift to cool.

The body was short and truncated,
But tell me now—what mattered that ?
The brain was immense—quite abnormal,
Far too big for an ordinary hat.

The question of heart (why, I know not)
Was left to a new 'prentice hand,
A one-wingèd novice, a fresher,
Only recently come to the Land.

In a moment of mild aberration
He balanced a star on his chin,
And packed up and sent off the being,
Without putting any heart in.

V

WHAT IS STRONGER THAN THE WOLF?

“ O, I’m tired of this poverty and tired of this
porridge ;
Love goes a fairish way, but there’s good in
money, too ;
And I’m often set to thinkin’ where I’d be and
what be doin’,
If I’d married ’Arry Atkinson and ’adn’t married
you !

“ O, there’s the kid a-squallin’ !—There’s no
peace ’ere for a body ;
Don’t swing your legs and fidget or you’ll drive
me raving mad !
I hadn’t ought to married you without a blessed
farthin’ ;
I’d ought to married ’Arry, and I wish to God
I had ! ”

And then the storm was over and the baby ceased
her crying,

And the only sound to hear was the ticking of
the clock,

Till a bitter sob broke out and stole across the
kitchen

From the man who sat and fidgeted before the
empty crock.

And then two arms were round his neck, his
head upon her bosom—

“ O, don’t ’ee mind me, William, nor my wicked
woman’s tongue !

I love ’ee, O, I love ’ee, man, with all the heart
that’s in me ! ”

And the bitterness was kissed away and left them
passing young.

VI

THE SLEEPERS

“Yus, 'ere they lie i' the peace of their God,
Their souls are away, an' their limbs 'neath the
sod,
We've a'most forgotten the paths w'ot they trod,
These 'ere sleepers.

This, on my right, is the grave of a man
W'ot for years upon years drove the baker's ole
van,
An' 'e drove it as only a real, good man can :
'E's a-sleepin'.

The baker 'isself ain't very far orf,
'E died of ole age, made worse by a corf,
A better man never put barm in a loaf,
And 'e's sleepin'.

An artist-man lies in that grave over yon,
'Is picturs ain't nothin' to 'im now 'e's gone,
Some said 'e were clever—come, let us get on,
There's plenty o' sleepers !

This one's little Mike's ; you've wondered maybe
 W'ot's darkened the days o' the missus an' me ?
 'Is eyes was that blue—but w'ot's that to 'ee !
 'E's a-sleepin'.

'Ere lies a poor body 'ose sin was found out,
 And folks none too kindly tossed 'er name about,
 But God will be gentle an' kinder, no doubt,
 When 'E wakes 'er.

That there with the angel a-spreadin' 'is wings,
 All decked out with flowers the little 'uns brings,
 Belongs to a party w'ot saw after things
 In the village.

This one's the Dean's lady, just 'ere by the brook,
 'E'd as soon lie beside 'er—but when 'e is took,
 'Twill be *inside* they'll put 'im in some special nook
 I'm a-thinkin'.

Yus, they seems very near as I potters about ;
 I sweeps up the leaves an' I keeps the dogs out ;
 But you've much grander graves in London, no
 doubt ?

Good-e'en, Sir."

VII

THE CONTENTED LOVER

WHEN the Powers made my Mary
They were running short, I grant 'ee ;
But they made the outside last,
You can comprehend that, can't 'ee ?

For her heart is big and golden,
And it's in its proper place ;
In some they've robbed the heart
And they've spent it on the face.

O, I would not have her fairer
If it made her shallow-hearted ;
So I end my song exactly
At the point at which I started.

VIII

WEALTH

MINE is the only light in the house,
Like Death, the night is still—
A silent streak proclaims the Dawn
As she climbs up Beggars' Hill.

One short hour more and the Dawn will come
Like a maid for her bridal dres't ;
Then soon the house will be astir,
And I shall sink to rest.

And they will call me "sleepy-head,"
And cry : "What, sleeping still !"
Poor souls ! They did not see the Dawn
As she climbed up Beggars' Hill !

IX

SUNDAY

ALL the folk are in the churches;
On the mountain-top I lie,
And we are having a long, sweet rest,
—God and I.

X

VISIONS

GOD has been very good to me ;
I have a small, green lawn—
In the blue light of evening
And the rose light of dawn,
I can dream dreams and see visions there,
On the dew-grey lawn.

And at the yellow times of day
Another joy it brings ;
I water it and roll it,
And do other helpful things ;
But the dreams and visions come back again,
When the last bird sings.

XI

NINE LIVES

HAD I the nine lives of a cat,
Some merry things I'd be ;
I'd be a Market-gardener,
And I'd sail an unknown sea.

I'd be a Gipsy, gaily clad,
And whittle wooden pegs ;
I'd be a true-born Romany,
Not the dreary sort that begs !

I think perhaps I'd be a Monk,
With sandals for my shoes,
And pick out little, godly words
In lovely reds and blues.

I'd like to be a Jester, too,
At the court of a foolish King,
With bauble, bladder, cap and bells,
And motley gay as Spring !

Drum-major would be rather grand,
Also a Circus Clown—
A Policeman has great power, so
They say, in London-Town.

Or what about a Beef-eater
With baggy pantaloons ?
Or that cheery fellow in the street,
So like his toy balloons ?

I'd be a Verger in a Church
And show the strangers round ;
I'd try to keep them reverent
Because of holy ground.

I should want lives—ah, nine times nine,
With a thousand years for each !
O, what a deal of idle talk—
I must be wise : I teach !

XII

SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

“ I LOVE all things that are blue,
Don't you ? ”

“ Yes, I do ;
But who are you ? ”

“ Nobody special—jest out for a ride on the 'bus,
An' when I saw that blue St Paul's ahead of us,
I felt that talk I must
Or I should—I trust
You are not vexed ? ”

“ Of course not !—What next !
What other things do you love ? ”

“ Lamp-reflections, wrinkled on the road,
An' furrowed fields before the seed is sowed,
Which I 'aven't seen for many a blessed year ;
There ain't no place to see 'em, very near ;
O, yes, an' real, good, sparklin' beer.
Them are some of the things I love—to mention
jest a few,
An', as I said before—I love all things that are
blue.

Now, Sir, *your* innin's—what about you ? ”
 “ I love—O God, I couldn't tell you in a day
 The things I love ; there's hay,
 For instance, and the smell of wood
 Being burnt in the open ; that's real good ;
 And, when you come to smells,
 There's the mist-drenched winds up on the
 fells,
 And Wall-flowers after warm rain
 When the sun comes out again—
 Then I've got a perfect wife ;
 —You've one, too, I bet my life—
 She's a cross between a Fairy
 And the Blessed Virgin Mary.”
 “ O, if you're countin' wives an' such,
 I can say some'at about *my* ole Dutch ;
 She ain't very much like the Virgin Mary,
 An' you couldn't exactly call 'er a Fairy ;
 But God made 'er sound,
 With 'is eyes wide open, I'll be bound.
 She's that straight an' level,
 A man would be the very devil
 Who couldn't be 'appy along of 'er—

You ought to see 'er—Great Scott ! I say,
We've come a jolly sight out of our way ! ”
“ Yes, we'll get off here and have a snack,
And a number eleven will take us back.”

XIII

ARIEL FORSAKEN

Now, longed-for freedom folds my restless
wings,

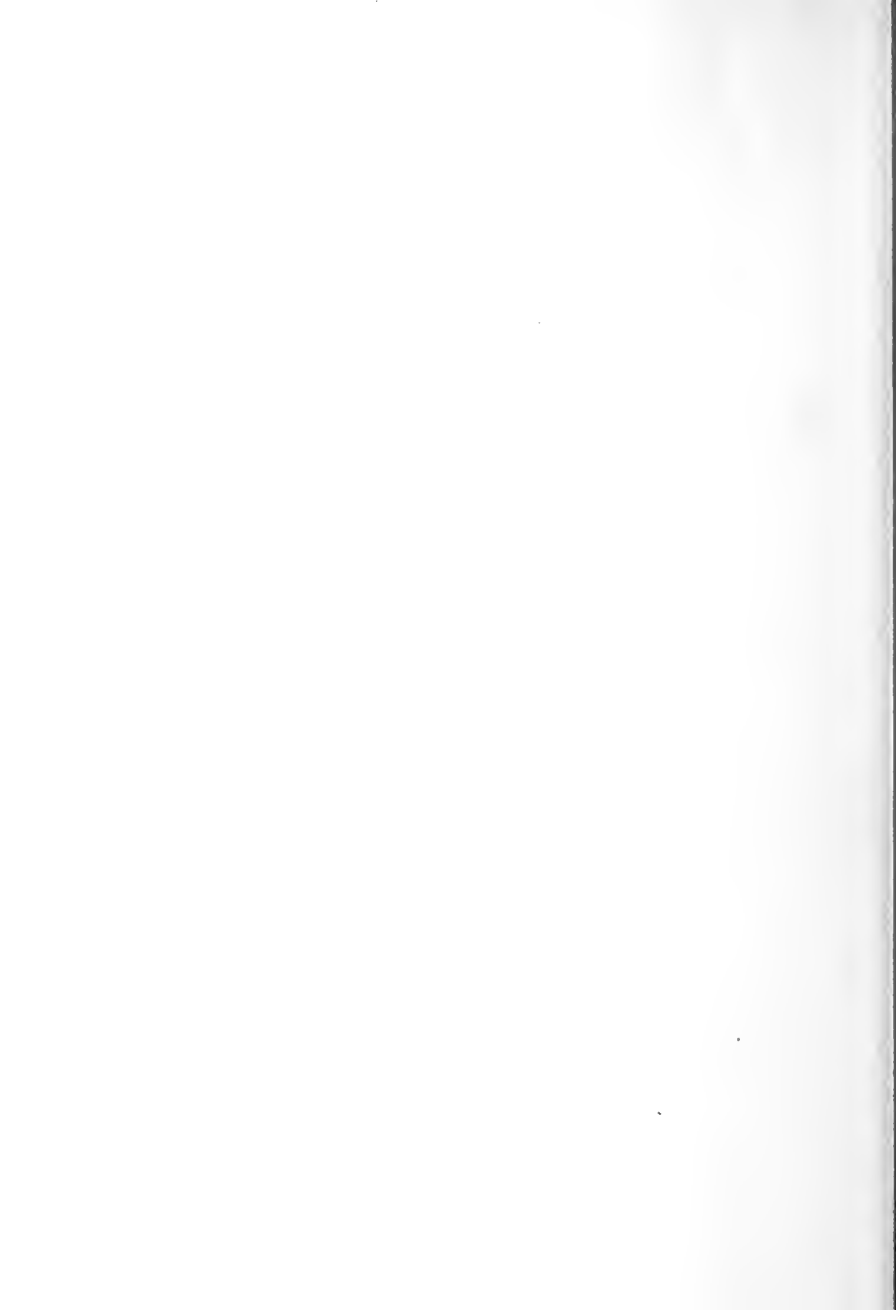
That many years have quivered on thy 'hest ;
Freer than taut-winged bat or bird that sings,
Untroubled now, my fairy-soul may rest.

I'll dog the star-befriended Moon, at night,
Dance to the merry jingle of the Wain ;
At morning dusk, in diamond-tinted flight,
Astride a moth, I'll flash to earth again.

.
O, Prospero, my fairy-heart will break !
Those vaunting words were lies upon my lip ;
My friendless freedom for thy service take ;
Hey Presto ! I am with thee on thy ship !

III

INDIFFERENT



I

ADVICE

“ AND you would have me bring my little craft
Out in the stormy bigness of the lake ?
It’s such a little, fragile, faerie barque,
Methinks the rigging, Parva dear, would break.”

“ The sun would turn its dewy sails to gold,
The silver ripples silver all its keel ;
O ! let the little boat its sweet strength know ;
O ! let it know the greatest good—to feel ! ”

“ Well, be it so ; I leave the sheltering shore,
The dear, dark niches and the shallow way ;
And leave the shell-pink fairies of the foam,
To seek the deep, where gods and giants play—

“ One little boon of the big ship I ask ;
That at its side my boat may fare along,
Until the gossamer grows taut and good,
And all the gold-kissed, silken sails grow strong—

“ And should the gods and giants toss my boat
And wreck it wantonly for merry jest,
Parva will lean over her vessel's side
And take the lesser captain in, to rest.

“ She'll gather in the treasure from the hold,
And hang the poor, drenched trappings out to
dry,
And put the lesser captain in the prow
Where she can be at rest and watch the sky.

“ And when they reach a little, sheltered bay,
Green-tinted by the mirror'd, velvet shore,
The rescued one will scramble down the side
And start to build a little boat once more.

“ Fairies will give their last year's wings for sails,
A Hare-bell hat will be my captain's bell ;
A Yew-berry my lantern at the prow,
My cabin small, a rosy-tinted shell.

“ And always up and down upon the wind
Will throb sweet messages between us twain ;
Mine will be songs of little, inlet joys,
Yours will be trumpets from the mighty main.”

II

EARTH-SICK

SAINT PETER beheld from his place at the Gate
 Sin-washed maidens three ;
And he thought as he gazed
At their white arms upraised
 Of the maids of Galilee.

Saint Peter sighed deep, his chin in his hand,
 His head against a tree ;
“ O for the sail
Growing big in the gale
 On the Lake of Galilee !

“ O for the measured splash of the oar,
 Cry of birds o’er the sea,
For the moon sailing high
In the pale summer sky
 O’er the Lake of Galilee !

“ O for a thousand things of the Earth ;
 A Woman’s company ;

For the children's play
At the end of the day,
 In the streets of Galilee !”

A shadow fell at the dreamer's side ;
 Peter felt Him nigh.
“ Brother of Mine,
What thoughts are thine ?
 —For My pierced heart heard thee sigh.”

“ My thoughts, dear Son of God, were vain,
 All unworthy Thee ;
I thought of the sail
Growing big in the gale
 On the Lake of Galilee.

“ I thought of the new moon sailing high
 O'er the sleeping sea ;
Of a woman near,
And the children dear,
 In the streets of Galilee.”

“ Brother, My thoughts strayed earthward, too ;
 I thought I called to thee,

As thou sat'st in thy barque
'Twixt the day and the dark
On the Lake of Galilee—

“ And thou followed Me from the water-side
To lonely Calvary ;
Thou suffered then
For the souls of men,
Thou son of Galilee.”

“ Jesus of Nazareth, sit and talk,
Jesus, talk to me !
Talk, for the sake
Of those days by the Lake
In blessed Galilee ! ”

III

PETER PAN

SHARP spears of silver rain around me fell,
Hurled from high Heaven athwart the city
smoke ;

Wind, wailing like a frightened spirit-voice,
Adown the street and through the traffic spoke.

I hurried, silent, through my lodging door,
And smiled to see my room, a little heaven
Of warmth and oak made ruddy by the fire,
My books, my chair, a singing kettle, even.

Forgotten were the chilly out-of-doors,
The spirit wind, the traffic, and the damp,
The dreary din of streets, the careworn crowd,
Beneath the warm enchantment of my lamp.

But God has given me a Mother heart,
Altho' my friends would designate me Man ;
I could not leave him lonely, in the rain,
Out in the chilly dark—poor Peter Pan !

Son is this winsome little man to me ;
So out into the sodden world again,
Across the desert Park, along the walk
I passed, and hailed him friendly in the rain.

The patter of the rain, in puddles round,
Was all that fell upon my list'ning ear ;
Still looking for some sign of gratitude,
To the cold, little figure I drew near.

And, looking up, I saw a wicked smile
Dimple his cheek and tremble round his chin :
“ O, how you love me, friendly, grown-up man,
To come out thus, when all the world is in ! ”

Then down to me from out his little pipe
Three notes, like golden wine, in music dropped ;
The wind had died away, the trees were still,
Out came the timid moon—the rain had stopped.

IV

FAIRYMEN

NOTHING could hurt a fairyman,
Not thunder-rain nor winter storm,
For he hid himself under the daisy-trees,
And slept 'tween the bunnies to keep himself
warm.

So he lived for ever and ever, you see,
As old and as young as the evening star ;
The loveliest—lissomest—joysomest thing
(How quite indescribable fairymen are !)

But things have changed—alack the day !
What thunder-rain and storm could not do
Has been done by the scorn of that terrible thing
Known as the “ Modern Child ”—that's You !

But an elderly dame of twenty-eight
Can fan them to life with a wish, you see ;
And she does it each eve, as the day grows pale
And the stars slide out—and the dame is Me !

V

COLOUR

I HAVE breathed beauty to-day,
And for it I thank God
Who gave it ;—wind and skies,
Brown sails, like butterflies,
Driven clouds and restless trees
And a thousand beauties, dear as these,
—And for the springiness of the sod.

Yet I think, O God, I thank Thee most of all
For this row of blue Delphiniums against the
grey stone wall.

VI

A SONG

WHAT is more passionate than the sky ?
What is more strong than the sea ?
Or what is more clean than God's good wind,
That comforts the soul of me ?

And if ever Love should come to me,
May it come like the sky and the wind and the
 sea !

VII

"THE GIFT OF THIS NEW DAY"

THE bells ring out on the blue air, the cold
air,

And they say that the day is dead ;
Cold and stiff and past and dead ;
Yet, not like the old, all ready for the tomb,
But like untimely child, dead from the womb.
What have I done or said ?

I've given nought to this good day, to God's
day,

Self-scorn is the harvest I reap ;
Lifeless ashes and dust I reap—
—Ashes of fires that glowed ruddy at the morn.
O, let my page of life from God's book be torn,
And give me endless sleep !

But a breath steals o'er me, a sweet mood, God's
Own mood,

And it lulls my soul to peace ;
Comforts my tortured soul to peace.

“How can'st thou judge, my little one?” He
saith :

“The soul I gave thee is too strong for Death ;
Let thy self-torment cease.”

So the dawn comes stealing, a young dawn, a
new dawn,

Gold-meshed in the tops of the trees ;

And the first bird stirs like a wind in the trees.

My window's reflected on the white wall behind
me ;

The new day comes on silver wings to find me
Hope-strong upon my knees.

VIII

COMPANIONSHIP

My heart leapt in my breast,
My blood raced, warm and free ;
And I was happy as a god,
As I gazed at the straight beech-tree.

I looked in the heart of a rose,
My joy was almost pain,
As there trickled out on my friendly hand
A jewel of the rain.

I said : "I love the world,
For the way a beech-tree grows ;
For the thrilling touch of diamond rain
From the crimson heart of a rose."

I heard your footstep then,
I felt you at my side ;
And I knew well why I loved the world,
And I knew that I had lied.

IX

YESTER EVE

YESTER eve our prayers went up
 To the Mercy Throne ;
To-night thou'rt cold, thy lips move not,
 I pray alone.

Yester eve I prayed for thee
 In mortal dread ;
To-night they say I must not pray,
 For thou art dead.

Though thou art dead, I pray for thee
 At the Mercy Throne ;
Who knows but thou wilt pray for me
 Left here alone ?

Thou art not far along the road,
 Just out of sight ;
Perhaps so near, that thou can'st hear
 My prayer, to-night.

X

FRIEND-SICK

UNTIL to-day, the sky, the sun,
God's all-sufficing sea,
And this and that one
Smiling with friendly eyes to comfort me
Have been enough ;
There is such joy in them !

But now, to-day, all these great things
Seem so much shrivelled dross ;
And nothing brings
That sense of friendly calm ; and life is loss,
And life is chill ;
There is no joy in it.

For one great lack, and only one,
Makes me heart-sick !
I hate the sun ;
I hate the smiling eyes, that smile to trick
Me into thinking
There is joy in them !

POEMS

And yet if you might come to-day
And sit a little while,
And talk the way
It was your wont, deep words beneath a smile,
I would reply
In words with joy in them.

XI

HEAVEN ?

If I should die to-night,
Now, in this night of Spring,
And wake to hear, not birds,
But the Angels of Heaven, sing,
Would there not be one joy
That Elysium could not bring ?

Would there be boughs of snow,
And the cold thrill of the dew ?
Would beech-leaves quicken the heart,
And shimmer against the blue ?
—Aught of this well-loved world ?
Or would all things be new ?

And if there were boughs of snow,
And the cold thrill of the dew,
And woodland air were green
Where the gold air glimmered thro',
Still would I lean from Heaven
And scan the world for you.

XII

GOD IN THE HOUSE

I stood above the Wingèd Victory
And, looking down, I saw gold broom aflame,
And music, played by one attuned to it,
Athwart the pulsing, vivid moment, came.

One trembling star showed through the open
door,
The scented dusk-wind blew upon my face ;
The music died away, the gold broom paled,
The star grew calm—and God was in that place.

XIII

“THE AGE OF BEAUTEOUS THINGS
HAS PASSED AWAY ”

I DREAMED a dream of desolation dark,
Such as had ne'er assailed my soul by day,
And, waking, murmured sadly to myself,
“The Age of beauteous things has passed away.”

My window framed a square of morning sky,
A silent streak proclaimed the wak'ning sun ;
One lonely star swam noiseless in the blue ;
“The Age of beauteous things has but begun.”

XIV

PRAISE

To Allah be praise for the comfort of days
In the Earth's by-ways, in the sun and the rain ;
And when day is o'er, for slumber, once more,
On the magical shore of our dreams, again.

For the music of springs—for the flapping of
wings,
For each bird that sings ; for nights of cool
peace ;
For the new crescent moon, for twilight and
noon,
And sleep, Thy great boon, when all world-
thoughts cease.

For gay butterflies ;—for tender, grey skies,
Sea-nesses that rise stark and grim from the sea ;
For the love in the Earth, for friendship and
mirth,
For beauty and worth ; for the power to be.

XV

REST

Down on my soul it floated,
This dream, like a twilight mist ;
And my soul threw off its garment
And from its place uprist
And said : " I will bathe in God's waters,
The waters which God hath kissed."

My soul grew young and vivid,
And strong with the strength of the young ;
As a hart on the topmost summit,
The high, lone hills among ;
And the glory of God o'erwhelmed me,
And silenced the word on my tongue.

I woke : and the scent of the heather
Brought back my dream to me ;
And the steadied gaze of my half-shut eyes
Fell on the distant sea—
I turned my face to my Maker :
" O God, Thou hast rested me ! "

XVI

EVENING PRAISE

ALL the live-long day
Have I battered on the Gates of Heaven
With songs of praise ;
And now my friendly clock strikes seven,
And one last song I raise—

I have thanked God for the wind,
Running water and the swish of grasses ;
For friendly looks,
And the smell of hay when a wagon passes ;
Now, last of all, for my books.

.
For the outside of my books,
The scarlet and the gilt and the leather,
And their own good smell ;
For the comfort of them in cheerless weather
Or in loneliness of soul ;
For the joy of them amidst the heather
Where the great purples roll.
For my books !—O God,
With them and a sweet friend
I could make Heaven of Hell !

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